

# A VISION FOR EVERYONE

## Discussion Guide

### Inviting Others: John 1.35-46

#### Getting Started: 10 minutes

- o Describe a time when you were invited to participate in something that really influenced you.
- o Optional: What, if anything from the sermon, encouraged, challenged, or really made you think?

**Setting the Stage:** *An invitation. It really is so simple, a request, an ask. Not too hard. Anyone can do it. Jesus did it all the time, only his ask was one that could change a life. Accepting Jesus' invitation meant one was starting a journey that would lead to taking up the very character of Christ himself. Part of that character is becoming one who invites, invites others into a life-changing relationship with Jesus. So if I am not inviting, perhaps the question I need to wrestle with is whether I am becoming, becoming like Christ.*

**Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes** (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read John 1.35-46.
- What invitations are given in the text? (*Look down through the text to draw out as many as possible.*)
- What might be significant about these invitations? Can you explain?
- What might it have taken for people to respond to these invitations? To give the invitation?
- Where do you see people inviting others to follow Jesus?
- From whom did you receive the invitation to follow Jesus? Apart from this invitation, how likely would you have chosen to follow Jesus?
- Do you feel called and equipped to invite others to follow Jesus? Can you elaborate?
- Consider and react to the following statement: "Jesus invited people into a life-changing relationship with himself. Those who accept this invitation do so for the purpose of becoming like Jesus, taking on his manner of life. Therefore, people who follow Jesus will, like Jesus, invite others into a life-changing relationship with Jesus." (Leader note: *You may wish to explore the issue of discipleship with your group at this point using the Group Notes. Urge your group to consider both the concept of discipleship and the connection between spending time with Jesus and becoming like him.*)
- As you become like Jesus, whom are you willing to invite to follow him? What might this invitation look like? How can we encourage one another this modeling of the life of Christ?

#### Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group prayer time
- o House-keeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)

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## Group Notes

### *Inviting Others: Discussion Guide*

#### **John 1.35-46**

##### **Context and Background**

**Discipleship:** As Jesus began his ministry, he drew to himself men and women who would become his disciples. This act was in keeping with the normal practice of ancient teachers of all cultures. A disciple was literally a follower, one who lived with a teacher for the purpose of being taught and led by them. A disciple lived with the teacher not just to understand his teaching but to understand and imitate his way of life. Simply put, a disciple's chief desire was to become like the teacher. In the ancient Jewish context, a disciple was always chosen, invited into the discipling relationship. This invitation began with the potential disciple expressing interest in becoming a disciple by following and listening to the rabbi. After some time, the rabbi might seek to ascertain the seriousness and capability of those interested in him. Those thought worthy would be invited into a disciple/teacher relationship in which the disciple would become part of the daily life of the rabbi for the purpose of learning from him and taking on his manner of life. Thus the call to discipleship was actually a call to a new way of living. One can still see this teacher/disciple relationship in some Eastern religions such as Buddhism and in Orthodox Judaism. In modern Orthodox Judaism, a rabbi will collect around himself a handful of disciples who watch and learn from him. Stories are told of how some disciples will follow their rabbi at all times, even into the bathroom, so as not to miss learning how he lives every aspect of life. However, in our modern Christian context, discipleship has lost much of its original meaning and intention. Today most Christians do not view themselves as disciples of Jesus. Rather, disciples are seen as a second, more devoted group of Christians, or even as a group limited to the original twelve followers of Jesus. Further, discipleship, post-Enlightenment, has been equated more and more as the process of acquiring knowledge. A "good disciple" is therefore one who has acquired and is well-versed in solid theology and dogma. Both of these modern ideas—discipleship as extra devotion and knowledge based—are foreign to the New Testament leading us to consider whether these ideas truly encapsulate discipleship. In the New Testament, all followers who truly attached themselves to Jesus were called disciples. There existed no second level of devotion. Second, discipleship involved knowledge acquisition, but this acquisition took place within a new way of living. Discipleship was a new way of life, a way of life learned by remaining with Jesus. Thus, the discipleship journey begins and progresses as one makes the intentional choice to "be with" Jesus for the purpose of learning from him and taking on his life. Apart from this turning to Jesus, the New Testament claims that discipleship is impossible (Luke 9.23-25, 57-62).

##### **The Text**

**Staying with Jesus (John 1.35-39):** Jesus is just beginning his ministry. He has been baptized by John (John 1.32-34), but has not yet begun his teaching ministry in Galilee. The primary declaration concerning Jesus to this point has come from John the Baptist (John 1.29-30, 35-36). John has labeled Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1.29, 36). This title is an echo of the Old Testament Passover Lamb, an echo that points to Jesus' role and ministry on the cross (Exodus 12 and John 19.16b-37). While those hearing John probably did not immediately grasp this deep meaning of Jesus' title, some seem to have understood that John was identifying Jesus as one who fulfilled Jewish messianic expectations. Here before them was the one God had sent to rescue the nation of Israel. Hearing John, two of his disciples detached themselves from John and sought to attach themselves to Jesus. The scene of these two men following after Jesus until he turns around may seem foreign to a modern reader, but actually these men are following the normal protocol of being selected as a disciple. A potential disciple would express interest in a rabbi by following him. After some time, the rabbi would acknowledge the one following and invite him into a discipleship relationship (See *Discipleship*). Jesus does turn and invite the two into such a relationship as he invites them to come and stay/remain with him. This language of "staying/remaining" is particular to the Gospel of John—appearing 40 times in John and 3 times in this passage alone while only appearing 12 times in the other Gospels—and bears strong overtones of discipleship pointing to deep attachment and loyalty. These two men are invited by Jesus into a deep, life-changing relationship with him by remaining with him for the purpose of learning from him and taking on his life.

**Inviting others (John 1.40-46):** One of these two early disciples of Jesus is named Andrew. After becoming a disciple of Jesus by accepting the invitation of Jesus into a life-changing relationship, Andrew goes and invites his brother Simon to become a disciple as well. He does this by physically bringing Simon to Jesus for the purpose of receiving the rabbi's invitation. Simon receives an invitation from Jesus, an invitation that indicates that accepting Jesus' call to discipleship will be a life-changing decision for Simon. To accept the invitation will change Simon's name to Peter. In the ancient world, names stood for a person's character. People were fully expected to act in accordance with what they were called. Jesus indicates that Simon will be changed into one who is a "rock" (*petros*). Reading Acts, one can see that Peter did become one of the solid foundations for the early Christian movement (Acts 1-11). In keeping with a rabbi just beginning his ministry, Jesus continues to invite other men to be his disciples. Deciding to travel to Galilee, the place where Jesus will officially begin his ministry, Jesus invites a man by the name of Philip to follow him. This phrase "to follow" bears much of the same weight as to "remain" with Jesus, for to follow Jesus implies that one will "be with" Jesus physically. Like Andrew, Philip finds another for the purpose of inviting him to be a disciple as well. As Philip encourages his friend Nathanael to become a disciple of Jesus, he does so by noting that Jesus is the prophet promised by Moses (Dt. 18.15-19) and spoken of by the prophets. This one was believed to be the one who would rescue Israel from physical and spiritual exile. Nathanael is somewhat incredulous at Philip's claim because of Jesus' origins. However, upon encountering Jesus, Nathanael too receives and accepts an invitation to be with Jesus, one that will open new vistas of experience for him (John 1.47-51).

**Application:** Jesus invites people into a life-changing relationship with himself, a relationship that leads to an entirely new way of life. Being with Jesus leads one to new vistas of experience that completely transforms one from who they are to one who looks and acts like Jesus. This is the discipling relationship. As a disciple of Jesus is moving to become like Jesus, so too will a disciple of Jesus engage in the practice of inviting for Jesus invited. Disciples of Jesus invite others into a life-changing relationship, not with themselves but with Jesus.